



THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC AND RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING

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Background

The obstacles faced by health care providers and patients in rural areas are vastly different than those in urban areas. Barriers unique to rural health care delivery systems include long travel distances to obtain health care, low population densities, lack of economies of scale and high rates of fixed overhead per patient revenue. An enduring characteristic of the rural health landscape is the uneven distribution and relative shortage of health care professionals.

Rural people are less likely to have private health care coverage, and the rural poor are less likely to be covered by Medicaid benefits than their urban counterparts. Moreover, all these factors have helped to set the stage for an opioid abuse crisis in rural America.

Issues/Challenges and Opportunities

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that opioids killed over 28,000 people in 2014, an average of more than 76 people every day. Additionally, a February 2014 study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* revealed rural areas have higher rates of drug poisoning deaths, including deaths from opioids; drug poisoning and deaths are increasing more than three times the rate in urban communities; rural adolescents are more likely to use prescription opioids nonmedically than are their urban counterparts; and drug abuse in rural communities creates an increased demand on health care, the social services, and criminal justice systems – thus making this the time to act immediately.

Nationally, roughly 35 percent of homeless individuals are substance abusers. Among homeless rural veterans nationally, substance abuse rates reach as high as 75 to 80 percent.

Providing an affordable, drug free rural housing option is a national challenge.

Discussion Questions

- What are the specific housing challenges and opportunities for consideration in this rural crisis?

- How can we as rural advocates best develop a national rural community opioid response?
- How can we better provide safe, affordable drug free housing in rural communities?
- How can we best engage rural health stakeholders to further enhance support to rural communities as they work to solve their rural opioid abuse challenges and raise awareness of solutions to these challenges?